

No 91

An account of the Epidemic Fever as
it occurred in Botetourt County Virginia
during the summer of the year eighteen
hundred and twenty one

By M. J. Lynch

59 Stth of -

Passed March 22 1823

2011 Dec 2nd. (A. S.)

EPIDEMIC FEVER

1

In the Western part of Virginia and between the Blue Ridge and Alleghany mountains is a local situation known in familiar language by the name of Big-Sick. The inhabitants of this part of the Country have been known for years past to possess a degree of health and Vigour of Constitution, which persons in many other sections of our Country, from Causes probably less Congenial to health do not enjoy - Amidst however this salubrity of Climate and uninterrupted enjoyment of health, a disease, rather of a novel Character, made its appearance which proved a source of considerable alarm and mortality. Indeed such was the degree of violence which it speedily assumed, that those practitioners who were called upon to combat it by all those means which their knowledge of the healing art suggested, were soon made sensible of their inability to triumph over so formidable an epidemic.

1555. - 1556.

for
d
pe
ad
gro
ac
as
be
un
ite
pro
In
top
dis
in
for
of
200

As regards the nature of this fever I may remark that some contrariety of opinion prevailed - By some practitioners the belief was entertained that the disease partook largely of the character of yellow fever - whilst by others the opinion was adopted of its having been only a high grade of Billious Remittent fever - An acquaintance with the symptoms as well as the causes which were supposed to have been operative in the production of the disease under consideration, may lead to a proper estimate of its true character - Of this I proceed now in detail to give some account. In the first place, however, it may be necessary to premise that the weather preceeding the disease was unusually warm - The Mercury in the thermometer ranged for the most part between seventy and eighty four degrees of Fahrenheit. The whole Country about the same time, was almost literally inundated

[Faint, illegible handwriting on lined paper]

[Faint, illegible handwriting on the right edge of the page]

by immense torrents of rain - and the creeks and Rivers rose to a height rarely before witnessed - which when receded left a variety of dispositions - Besides these general causes there are others which may be enumerated as having, been sources equally prolific of disease - The Big-hick farm contains several swamps and marshes, which having been subjected to the combined operation of heat and moisture, which at this time prevailed ~~up to~~ excepts, may be supposed to have given rise to an exhalation of noxious miasmata. Again, there was a Mill-pond which was filled with stagnant water and drawn off some time in the beginning of the summer, leaving vegetable and animal substances - These substances it is reasonable to suppose underwent the fermentation and putrefaction process and thus gave rise to the production of effluvia possessing deleterious properties. To this source was imputed the primary cause

[Faint, illegible handwriting in cursive script, likely a letter or manuscript page.]

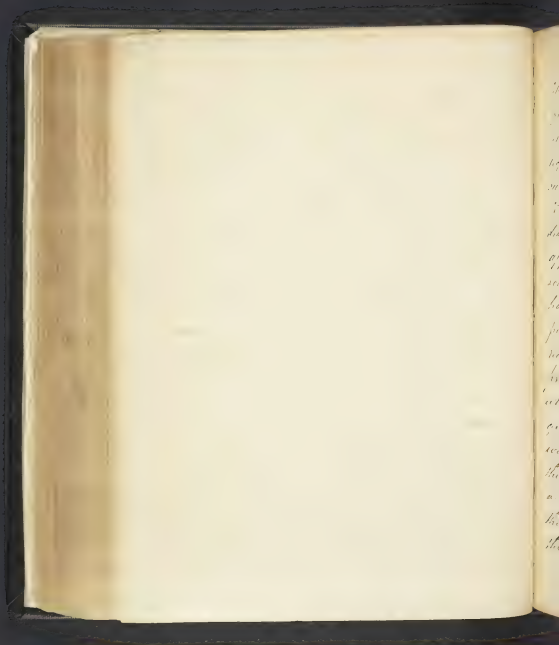
[Faint, illegible handwriting visible on the right edge of the page, possibly from the adjacent page.]

of the fever for as singular and incredible as it may appear, this effluvia was so very offensive in its nature that it was with much difficulty that even horses could be prevailed upon to approach the pond, without manifesting the most acute sensitiveness - snorting as if conscious of impending danger - Indeed the Canine species in many instances is said to have fallen victims to these exhalations. These statements can be substantiated by many respectable persons - The most prominent symptoms of this fatal epidemic ~~were~~ were great lassitude and debility, pain in the head back and loins, small frequent pulse, sometimes intermittent, but rarely hard pain about the precordia, suffusive or profuse perspiration, the patient sleeping with his eyes half shut, black discharges from the bowels, Vomiting of a dark brown matter or green frothy bile, subultus tendimus singultus, picking at the bed clothes, Coma

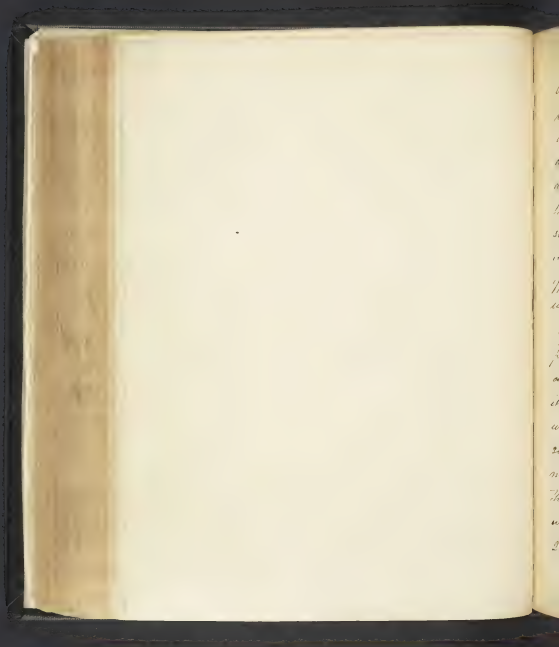
delirium into death. Towards the close of the
 disease the secretions and excretions became
 extremely facted - generally in forty eight
 hours from the accession of the disease the
 body became tinged of a bluish line, which
 colour was first observable in the eyes, next
 on the breast and finally over the whole
 surface of the body. The tongue at first somewhat
 dry and exhibiting a white appearance became
 ultimately of a dark brown colour - the
 urine was sometimes high coloured, at other
 times however it retained its usual appearance.
 The secretory action of the liver was for
 the most part much increased, and bile was
 copiously excreted. In some cases the disease
 was ushered in by with symptoms of increased
 vascular action - in others however such
 symptoms were rather ambiguous. On
 this point I may remark practitioners were
 at issue, and consequently they treated the

of
men
also
as

disease on principles which were diametrically
opposite. In conformity with the views of
these physicians who supposed that the
system from the first was much prostrated
stimulants ~~the~~ and Tonics, the most potent
were exhibited - the chief of which were
brandy, Wine, Volatile Alkali, Bark, Seneka
& lesser Vitriol, Camphor &c. By those who
entertained different views on the subject
and by whom the belief was indulged
that an inflammatory diathesis ~~was~~
existed in the system, during the first
stage, an opposite plan of treatment
was instituted, and depletion measures
were ~~now~~ called into requisition and
carried to some extent. In consequence
of the great irritability of the stomach
Medicines by the mouth, became in some
degree impracticable, at least so long
as this state of the stomach continued

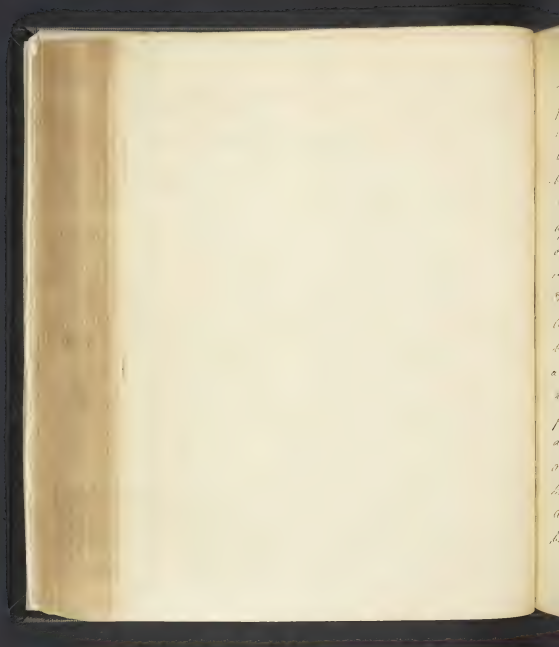


this condition of it was generally removed in a
 great measure by the use of lime water and
 milk or by gum and the application to the
 region of the stomach of flannel cloths wrung
 out in a warm decoction of Chamomile flowers
 For the same purpose was used the effervescent
 draught. If these measures failed a blister
 applied over the region of the stomach was
 sometimes productive of good - The patient
 having vomited six was done sufficiently.
 purgatives were next used to evacuate the
 redundant bile, which continued to be
 preternaturally secreted - The purgative
 which was mostly used, was calomel
 given either alone or in combination
 with Zallap. or Rhubarb - Castor Oil
 the neutral salts, &c. were also used to preserve
 a soluble state of the bowels - Along with
 the use of these evacuates, or preceding them
 the lancet was occasionally used



When the disease was farther advanced
Iridism and sinapism, were applied to the
different parts of the body, to sustain or to
arouse the system which in two or three
days became alarmingly prostrated. Of
the utility of Iridism however in this disease
some were distrustful - Mercury was given
in small doses with a view to its salivary
effect - but the system could not be put
under the full operation of either medicine.

Of the comparative efficiency of the different
plans of treatment which were adopted,
and of which I have given the outlines
it is difficult or perhaps impossible to say
which of the two was the more successful
since neither proved but little more than
mere palliatives. It may be asserted without
the fear of contradiction, that this epidemic
was but little understood. To this conclusion
I am led from two circumstances



The first is, that of the disease having proved fatal in almost every instance. Secondly no post mortem examinations were made by the aid of which some light may have been afforded in relation to its true character. Most cases of this fever terminated on or after the sixth day, others however terminated on the third and fourth. More than one instance occurred in which, from an apparent Convalescence, the patient and his friends anticipated a speedy and happy recovery; but such symptoms served only to create a sad disappointment. From the mortality and other concomitants of this formidable fever, many persons believed it to be contagious and such was the degree of terror, which resulted as the offspring of such an opinion, that the patient did not receive that degree of attention and proper nursing which has been admitted to have a considerable influence

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely from a 17th or 18th-century manuscript. The text is written on aged, slightly discolored paper and is arranged in approximately 15 horizontal lines. The script is fluid and characteristic of the period, though the ink is somewhat faded. The left edge of the page shows the binding of the book, and the right edge shows the gutter where it meets the next page.

influence in the cure of diseases - nor did
he in many instances derive that solace
from the cheering presence of a friend, which
near the close of life, may be most desirable.
There were however no grounds for the
supposition that this disease was of such
a character.

Micajah T. Lynch

